UK GARMENT MANUFACTURING

A PRACTITIONER'S REFERENCE

UK Garment Manufacturing

A Practitioner's Reference

The production sequence, specification and measurement practice, quality and testing vocabulary, and commercial terms of trade

FIRST EDITION

Silk Routes Limited
United Kingdom

UK Garment Manufacturing: A Practitioner's Reference

First edition, 2026.

Published by Silk Routes Limited, a clothing manufacturer operating in the United Kingdom since 2008. Company information is filed with Companies House.

This handbook is issued as a general reference to garment manufacturing practice and terminology. It contains no pricing, lead-time or minimum-quantity figures, since these vary by garment, fabric, quantity and season, and any figure stated here would be misleading for most readers.

Nothing in this handbook constitutes legal, regulatory or compliance advice. Labelling, safety and testing obligations differ by market and product type, and readers should confirm current requirements applicable to their own products and markets before relying on any description given here.

Where terminology varies between factories, regions and sectors, the usage given is the one most commonly encountered in United Kingdom and European production. Specialist sectors carry additional vocabulary beyond the scope of this reference.

This work may be freely copied, distributed and quoted in unmodified form for non-commercial and educational purposes, with attribution to the publisher.

© 2026 Silk Routes Limited. silkroutes.co.uk

Contents

	Preface and scope	5
I	The production sequence	6
II	Specification and measurement	8
III	Quality, testing and inspection	10
IV	Commercial terms of trade	11
V	Recurring failure points	14
	About the publisher	16

Preface and scope

Garment manufacturing is documented unevenly. Technical instruction exists in abundance for those training to work inside a factory, and marketing material exists in abundance for those buying from one. Between the two sits a body of working practice that is rarely written down at all: the sequence in which decisions are taken, the vocabulary used to record them, and the points at which orders characteristically go wrong.

This handbook attempts to set out that middle ground. It is written for the people who commission garment production rather than those who carry it out — brand founders, designers, product managers and sourcing staff who must hold a competent conversation with a manufacturer without having worked in one.

Scope

The material covers cut-and-sew garment production as practised in the United Kingdom and, with local variation, across Europe. It follows an order from specification through to delivery, and treats terminology in the context where it arises rather than alphabetically.

Knitwear produced on knitting machines, technical and performance outerwear, and bespoke tailoring each carry substantial additional vocabulary and process detail not covered here. Where those sectors diverge significantly from general practice, the divergence is noted but not developed.

A note on figures

This handbook contains no prices, lead times or minimum quantities. That omission is deliberate. Such figures depend on garment construction, fabric availability, order size, colour count, size range and the season in which the order is placed. A number printed in a reference work is read as authoritative long after it has ceased to be accurate, and the damage done by a stale figure exceeds the convenience of having one.

Where a reader needs such figures, they are properly obtained from a manufacturer against a specific specification and quantity.

Terminology

Terms are set in bold at first substantive use. Where a term is commonly misunderstood, the misunderstanding is stated explicitly rather than left to inference — experience suggests that the confusions which cost money are consistent enough to be named.

I The production sequence

Garment production proceeds as a sequence of approvals rather than a continuous process. Each stage terminates in a decision that must be recorded before the next begins. Orders that run late have most often lost time at an approval rather than in manufacturing.

Specification

Production begins with the **tech pack**: the document from which the factory manufactures. A complete tech pack contains flat technical drawings showing front, back and any construction not evident from those views; a **bill of materials** listing every component with supplier reference and consumption; a table of **points of measure** with target values and tolerances; construction detail specifying seam and stitch types; and labelling and packing requirements.

Fields left blank in a tech pack do not remain undecided. They become decisions taken by the factory, generally in the direction of whatever is fastest to produce. Recording an open question explicitly is materially different from leaving a gap.

Pattern and first sample

A **first pattern** is cut in a single nominated **sample size**, to which every specification measurement subsequently refers. Where a brand maintains **blocks** — base patterns representing its established fit — development proceeds from those rather than from a new draft, which reduces both cost and fit risk across seasons.

The **proto sample** follows. It tests proportion, silhouette and construction, and is commonly made in whatever suitable fabric is available rather than in the intended bulk cloth. It is not a fit sample and should not be measured as one; doing so is among the more common early errors, and produces correction requests that the next sample renders meaningless.

Fit and approval

The **fit sample** is made in bulk or bulk-equivalent fabric and measured against every point in the specification. Comments are recorded per point of measure rather than as general impressions, since a fit correction must be actionable at the pattern.

Two to three fit rounds are usual. A materially higher number generally indicates that the original specification was incomplete rather than that the factory is failing to execute.

Materials

Bulk fabric and trims are confirmed in parallel with fit development. Colour is approved through **lab dips** — small dyed swatches submitted against a target reference — and the acceptable range of variation between production **dye lots** is fixed by an approved **shade band**.

Fabric testing is carried out before cutting. Shrinkage and colour fastness are the two results that most often prevent an order proceeding, and both are unrecoverable once bulk fabric has been cut. This sequencing is not administrative caution; it is the difference between a delayed order and a written-off one.

Pre-production and bulk

The **pre-production sample** is made on the bulk line, in bulk fabric, with bulk trims. It is the last representative check before production and, once approved and sealed by both parties, becomes the **gold seal** against which delivered goods are judged.

Bulk manufacture then proceeds: fabric is laid, a **marker** is planned to arrange pattern pieces efficiently across the **lay**, pieces are cut and bundled, and the garment is assembled through its sequence of sewing **operations**. Finishing — washing, pressing, trimming and packing — follows.

Inspection and delivery

Inspection occurs at two points. **Inline inspection** during sewing identifies systematic faults before an entire order is affected. Final inspection checks finished goods against the gold seal and the specification, and typically includes a measurement audit on a sampled quantity.

Summary of stages

STAGE	MATERIAL USED	WHAT IS DECIDED
Proto sample	Any suitable fabric	Proportion, silhouette, construction
Fit sample	Bulk or equivalent	Measurement against specification
Sales sample	Correct fabric and colour	Presentation to buyers
Pre-production	Bulk fabric and trims	Representative approval of bulk
Gold seal	The approved PP sample	The delivery standard

II Specification and measurement

A specification exists to make a garment checkable. Language describing intent — relaxed, oversized, close to the body — cannot be inspected against. Numbers with tolerances can.

Points of measure

A **point of measure** is a defined location at which a dimension is taken, together with the method of taking it. A specification that names a measurement without defining where and how it is measured will produce disagreement at inspection.

Vertical measurements conventionally originate at the **high point shoulder**, the highest point of the shoulder seam at the neck. Curved measurements — the armhole in particular — must state whether they are taken along the curve or as a straight line between endpoints, as the two differ substantially.

Tolerance

Every measurement carries a permitted deviation. A specification without tolerances is not enforceable: no two garments in a production run measure identically, and the question at inspection is not whether a garment matches the target but whether it falls within the agreed range.

Tolerances are not uniform across a garment. Points affecting fit at the body typically carry tighter tolerances than lengths and widths at the extremities.

Ease

Ease is the difference between body measurement and garment measurement. Wearing ease permits movement; design ease creates the intended silhouette. The distinction matters because a fit comment addressing silhouette is a design change, while one addressing movement is a fit correction, and the two are resolved differently.

Grading

Grading scales the base pattern across the size range. Increments need not be uniform: a measurement may step consistently across the range, or may step differently at the extremes to preserve proportion. The grading rule for each point of measure should be recorded alongside the base measurement.

Grading proceeds outward from the sample size. Which size the pattern was originally cut in therefore affects fit accuracy at the extremes of the range, and should be chosen with the expected sales distribution in mind rather than by convention.

Seam allowance

Seam allowance — the fabric between stitch line and raw edge — is a specification item, not a factory default. It affects finished measurements, and different allowances at different seams are common and legitimate, but must be stated.

Construction

Seam and stitch type are specified per area rather than for the garment as a whole. **Stitches per inch** records stitch density; higher density is generally stronger and slower to sew, and the choice is therefore a cost decision as well as a quality one.

Thread should be specified with its intended relationship to the fabric colour. An instruction to use contrast thread without a colour reference is incomplete, and the resulting choice will be the factory's.

Grain and directionality

Pattern pieces are cut with reference to the **grain line**, the direction of the warp threads. Cutting off grain produces twisting and unstable fit that cannot be corrected by pressing.

Fabrics with a **nap** — a raised surface with direction, as in velvet or corduroy — or with a directional print require all pieces to be cut the same way. This constrains the marker and increases fabric consumption, and should be anticipated at costing rather than discovered at cutting.

Common specification omissions

OMITTED	CONSEQUENCE
Tolerances	Measurement disputes cannot be resolved objectively at inspection.
Seam allowance	Finished measurements drift from the specification.
Sample size	Graded measurements have no defined origin.
Measurement method	Curved and straight readings are compared as though equivalent.
Thread colour	Contrast stitching is executed to the factory's judgement.
Artwork placement origin	Placement moves relative to the body across the size range.
Packing ratio	Cartons cannot be planned; delivery is delayed at packing.

III Quality, testing and inspection

Quality practice divides into two activities that are frequently conflated. **Quality control** detects faults in produced goods. **Quality assurance** is the system intended to prevent them arising. A factory with strong inspection and weak assurance will find faults reliably and repeat them indefinitely.

Fabric testing

Testing takes place before cutting, on the actual bulk fabric rather than on a submitted swatch from an earlier lot. The tests most consequential to a finished garment concern dimensional stability after laundering, colour retention under washing and rubbing, and surface durability in wear.

Which tests are appropriate depends on **end use**. A garment intended for frequent laundering carries different requirements from one intended for occasional wear, and specifying tests without reference to end use produces either unnecessary cost or inadequate coverage.

Test standards and required results should be agreed in writing before bulk. Standards bodies publish detailed methods for each test type, and the applicable standard varies by market and product category; the appropriate references should be confirmed for the specific product rather than assumed.

Inspection points

Inline inspection is carried out during sewing at defined intervals. Its value is temporal: a fault identified at the two hundredth garment affects two hundred garments, while the same fault identified at final inspection affects the order.

Final inspection checks finished goods against the gold seal and specification. It conventionally covers appearance, construction, measurement on a sampled quantity, labelling accuracy and packing conformity.

The procedure to be followed when a batch fails inspection should be agreed before production rather than negotiated during it. The relevant questions are who bears the cost of rework, what the acceptable rework methods are, and how the reworked batch is re-inspected.

Colour

Colour approval proceeds through lab dips against a physical target reference. Approval from a screen image is not approval: display calibration, ambient light and material surface all alter perceived colour, and a difference invisible on a monitor may be obvious in a finished garment.

Variation between dye lots is normal rather than defective. The approved shade band fixes how much variation is acceptable, and its absence leaves the question unanswerable.

IV Commercial terms of trade

A unit price is meaningless without the terms under which it is quoted. The same garment quoted on three different bases will produce three different numbers, none of which is comparable to the others.

Bases of quotation

BASIS	WHO SOURCES MATERIALS	WHAT THE PRICE COVERS
CMT	The brand	Cutting, making and trimming only. The brand bears sourcing cost and risk separately.
FOB	The factory	Materials and manufacture, with goods delivered to a named port. Onward freight, insurance and duty are additional.
Full package	The factory	Sourcing, manufacture and finishing, delivering finished goods. Component costs are not separately visible.

Minimum order quantity

A **minimum order quantity** may apply at several levels simultaneously: per style, per colourway, per size, or per fabric. A stated minimum that does not specify its level is not yet usable information, and the difference between a per-style and a per-colourway minimum can change a viable order into an unviable one.

Fabric minimums frequently bind before factory minimums. Mills commonly sell by the full roll, and a factory willing to make a short run may still be unable to buy cloth for one.

What drives a quotation

Six factors account for most of the variation between quotations for a similar garment. Understanding which is dominant in a given case is more useful than negotiating the total.

Operation count

The number of discrete sewing steps. This, rather than fabric, drives making cost in most garments.

Fabric behaviour

Slippery, stretchy, napped and delicate cloths cut and sew more slowly and waste more in the lay. Difficult fabric is a labour cost as much as a material one.

Quantity

How many units carry the fixed costs of pattern, marker, setup and changeover, and whether the run is long enough for the line to reach normal speed.

Repeat likelihood

A credible repeat order changes how setup cost is treated across the relationship.

Scheduling

Where the order falls against the factory's existing commitments.

Specification risk

Unclear specification, unapproved fabric and unresolved fit each carry a cost, because the consequence of error must be absorbed by one party or the other.

Ownership and confidentiality

Ownership of patterns, samples, artwork and blocks developed during a relationship should be recorded in writing at its outset. The question becomes contentious only when a brand wishes to move production, at which point the position is difficult to establish retrospectively.

Retention periods for patterns and the gold seal sample after delivery should likewise be agreed. A repeat order placed after the factory has disposed of the pattern is a new development, priced accordingly.

Quantity tolerance

Delivered quantity conventionally carries a tolerance in both directions, since cutting yield cannot be predicted exactly. The permitted range, and whether over-delivery is invoiced, should be stated in the order.

V Recurring failure points

The following account for a disproportionate share of orders that fail, run late or cost more than quoted. Each is preventable at a stage earlier than the one at which it is usually noticed.

Shrinkage identified after cutting

Dimensional change discovered once bulk fabric is cut cannot be corrected. The garments are either accepted out of specification or written off. Testing before cutting is the only remedy, and its cost is trivial against the exposure.

Fit comments recorded against the proto

The proto tests shape rather than size, and is frequently made in a different fabric from bulk. Measurements taken from it generate corrections that the fit sample invalidates, consuming a full sample cycle.

Colour approved from an image

Colour, surface and drape do not survive reproduction on a screen. Approval from a photograph regularly produces bulk that is technically compliant and commercially unacceptable.

Specification changed after cutting

Once bulk fabric is cut to a graded pattern, a specification change is a new order rather than an amendment. The cut fabric cannot be recovered.

Blank fields in the tech pack

Unspecified detail is resolved by the factory in the direction of production efficiency. Recording an open question explicitly invites advice; leaving a blank does not.

Approvals missed against the critical path

Production slots are booked in advance. An approval missed by days may move delivery by considerably more, because the next available slot is not the next day.

Comparing quotations across different bases

A CMT price and a full-package price are not comparable figures. Selecting on the lower number without normalising the basis is among the most expensive errors available to a new brand.

Preventive sequence

Expressed as a sequence, the preventive measures corresponding to the above are straightforward and largely front-loaded.

STAGE	ACTION	PREVENTS
Specification	Complete every field; mark open questions TBC	Factory-side default decisions
Specification	State tolerances and seam allowances	Unenforceable measurements
Proto	Assess shape only; record no fit measurements	Wasted sample cycles
Fabric	Test shrinkage and fastness before cutting	Unrecoverable bulk loss
Colour	Approve physical lab dips and a shade band	Unacceptable bulk colour
Pre-production	Seal and retain the approved sample	Disputed delivery standard
Throughout	Hold approvals to the critical path dates	Slot loss and delivery slip

None of these measures requires specialist knowledge. They require only that the decisions be taken in the order in which the process makes them cheap to take.

About the publisher

Silk Routes Limited is a clothing manufacturer operating in the United Kingdom since 2008, working with new and established brands across cut-and-sew, CMT and full-package production. Its work spans first sampling through to repeat bulk orders.

This handbook was compiled from working practice rather than from secondary sources. It is published as a reference for those commissioning garment production, and is offered without charge or registration.

Corrections

Terminology and practice vary, and a reference of this kind benefits from correction. Readers who find a definition inaccurate, incomplete or inconsistent with usage in their own sector are invited to say so, and material corrections will be incorporated in subsequent editions.

Further material

Extended guidance on the topics covered here is maintained at silkroutes.co.uk, including detailed treatments of specification practice, manufacturer selection, sampling and production planning.

Silk Routes Limited
Clothing manufacturing services

https://silkroutes.co.uk/clothing-manufacturing-services/
https://silkroutes.co.uk/

UK Garment Manufacturing: A Practitioner's Reference. First edition, 2026. Published by Silk Routes Limited, United Kingdom. This work may be freely copied, distributed and quoted in unmodified form for non-commercial and educational purposes, with attribution. It does not constitute legal, regulatory or compliance advice.